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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 YAOUNDE 000687

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [CM](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [NI](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#)  
SENV, SOCI, MASS  
SUBJECT: CAMEROON TAKES OVER BAKASSI IN SIX WEEKS

REF: (A) YAOUNDE 1355 (B) ABUJA 1201 (C) LAGOS 211

Classified By: Poloff Linnisa Wahid for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

11. (C) Summary. The Government of Nigeria (GoN) is expected to hand over the remaining area of the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula (known as "the zone") to Cameroon on August 14 2008, in accordance with the 2006 Greentree Agreement. Insecurity and criminal activity in "the zone" has risen in the two years since the signing of the Greentree Agreement and has concurrently seen the withdrawal of Nigerian troops and deadly attacks against Government of Cameroon (GRC) forces in November 2007 and June 2008. The deteriorating security climate is driven by a weak law enforcement presence in "the zone" and the lack of political buy-in from the local population, exacerbated by their dire economic conditions. The GRC will not be able to smoothly integrate Bakassi into Cameroon without addressing these underlying causes of increased criminal activity. Nevertheless, there is no sign that either Cameroon or Nigeria plans to back away from its obligations under the Greentree Agreement. The GRC and GoN have responded to the attacks by promising closer coordination on security issues, a development to be encouraged by the USG and others. The USG might also be helpful with targeted military assistance, small development projects, diplomatic engagement, and intelligence support. End Summary.

#### The June 9 Attack

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12. (C) On June 9, an armed group believed to be local Nigerian youths and criminals opposed to Bakassi's return to Cameroon attacked the Deputy Sub-Regional Governor and eight Cameroonian military personnel who were reportedly investigating allegations of arms trafficking in the Bakassi Peninsula. The youths killed and mutilated six of the nine members of the delegation. Following this atrocity, local Nigerians claimed that Cameroonian security forces carried out reprisal attacks and reportedly arrested several hundred youths in the area (see refs B and C). In light of these events, the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission agreed on the need for both countries to coordinate and strengthen their efforts to improve security around the Bakassi Peninsula, but there is no planned joint investigation into the incidents. The Cameroonian press has sharply criticized the GRC's reaction to the events, some saying that President Paul Biya should have cut short his Swiss vacation and others saying that those killed should have had a state funeral. Observers also note that the assailants who killed 21 Cameroonian soldiers on November 7, 2007 still remain unknown (ref A).

#### Political Situation

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13. (SBU) The Nigerian High Commission in Cameroon estimates that there are between three and four million Nigerians living in Cameroon, with the majority settled in Douala and in towns near the Nigerian border. When the transfer of Bakassi is complete, Nigerians in Bakassi will have three means of legal recognition: they can return to and receive relocation assistance from the GoN; they can apply for Cameroonian citizenship, or; they can remain in Cameroon as Nigerians. Despite these options, many in Bakassi remain disgruntled that the GoN will abide by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling and hand Bakassi to Cameroon. They claim they were not consulted during the Greentree process and lack ties to Cameroon. Furthermore, many are worried that the GRC will meddle in the region, which was relatively autonomous from the GoN. Further complicating the situation, the indigenous elite of the area continue to use legal recourse and the media to fan the flames of resentment and attempt to stall the complete hand-over of Bakassi, probably in hopes the GRC and GoN will buy them off.

#### Security

14. (C) The Bakassi Peninsula remains a patchwork of security arrangements, leaving the region relatively insecure. The Nigerian military withdrew from most of Bakassi in August 2006, but Cameroonian armed forces did not deploy into the region until late 2007, adding to the instability. The Nigerian police remain in control of "the zone" and are authorized to carry light arms to maintain law and order. Even where they are present, the GRC

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military is severely undermanned and under-resourced. Nigerian bandits continue to attack both Nigerians and Cameroonians in an attempt to maintain their free rein to conduct illegal activities.

#### GRC Perspective on Security

15. (C) On June 25, Poloff spoke with Richard Penda, Special Advisor on Bakassi to Minister of Justice Amadou Ali, who leads the GRC's engagement in Bakassi. Penda said that security and law and order are the most important issues in Bakassi. He affirmed that the GRC and GoN remain committed to the Greentree Agreement and that the GRC has no evidence of GoN complicity in the criminal acts in the region. Penda told Poloff that the killing and mutilation of the deputy sub-regional governor was tantamount to war, a clear signal that the militants were trying to control the area.

16. (C) Penda denied the allegations of reprisal attacks on the civilian population by GRC security forces (refs B and C) to avenge the June 9 deaths. He speculated that the Nigerians responsible instructed people to flee and to claim the Cameroonian military forced them to leave as part of a misinformation campaign to convince the international community that the GRC would terrorize Nigerians in Bakassi once the hand-over was complete.

17. (C) Penda said that although it was clear that Nigerian criminals and youths were the culprits, the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) -- a weak secessionist organization in Cameroon with most of its members residing in the US or the UK -- was using the events to encourage people in Bakassi to join the "struggle" against Cameroonian domination. According to Penda, the criminal elements in Bakassi were "small time dealers" who hide behind and receive assistance from rebels in the Niger Delta. Penda predicted that criminal activity in Bakassi could be controlled without resolving the neighboring Niger Delta issue, but suggested that solving the Niger Delta problem would drastically reduce the criminal activity in Bakassi. As with all maritime areas, Penda said, there are some criminal elements that are

difficult to control.

#### GRC Perspective on Special Assistance

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¶18. (C) Penda stated that the GoN "did nothing to develop Bakassi" and therefore the GRC needed to build schools and hospitals in "the zone", just as it did in other parts of Bakassi. Nevertheless, he said there would be no special assistance to the region, asking why the GRC should provide special assistance when the area is mostly populated by Nigerians with no allegiance to Cameroon. Penda predicted that Nigerians in Bakassi would travel to Nigeria to receive relocation assistance then return to Bakassi. Penda stressed that the GRC will insist that the people in Bakassi respect and follow Cameroonian laws.

#### European Commission Support

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¶19. (SBU) On June 26, Poloff spoke with Claude Bochu, Political Counselor at the European Union Mission in Cameroon. He told Poloff that the E.U. gave a \$6 million grant to the GRC to finance micro projects in Bakassi, such as health, education, potable water and other social amenities. Bochu said E.U. policy prohibited using the funds for road construction, which had been the GRC's request. Bochu added that the E.U. also financed a \$225,000 project to construct a primary school and health center in the region.

#### USG Support

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¶10. (SBU) The USG continues to support the GRC military through a variety of programs, including African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA), Foreign Military Finance (FMF), the Africa Partnership Station (APS), and other activities. APS and other maritime security-focused programs will build infrastructure, train military personnel, provide equipment and improve information sharing for the GRC military. Specifically, the USG is providing two new small boats and ten outboard motors, which are desperately needed by the GRC Navy and Marines to improve mobility and security. Additionally, the USG is purchasing radios for the military to improve command, communication and control. Through APS, the USG is

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also providing regional training opportunities to enable many countries in the Gulf of Guinea to develop links and improve their coordination with each other to promote better maritime security in the region. Some of this assistance will probably be used in Bakassi.

¶11. (C) When asked how the USG might be helpful in Bakassi, Secretary General at the Ministry of External Affairs Sebastian Foumbane expressed the GRC's great appreciation for past U.S. support on the issue. He hoped the USG could help with intelligence and development assistance. He noted that the GRC had a committee attached to the Prime Minister's office which is putting together a Bakassi assistance plan. The plan will be submitted to donors for possible financial support, he added.

#### Comment

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¶12. (C) Given the current conditions, it is likely that the attacks and arms and drug trafficking will continue to increase in Bakassi. The criminals will continue to test the strength and will of the GRC to secure the area. Unfortunately, the GRC is not up to the challenge, with increasing security problems in northern and eastern Cameroon, most notably "coupers des routes", the GRC is hard-pressed to find the manpower and equipment to control 396 square miles of an undeveloped, remote and swampy

territory. The fact remains that the GRC and the GoN must work together to secure the region. However, despite the call by the Cameroon-Nigerian Mixed Commission to increase security cooperation, without the strong backing and technical support of the USG and the international community, the chances of increased security cooperation are limited.

¶13. (C) The USG and the international community can help stabilize Bakassi by providing humanitarian, political and security assistance. Targeted military assistance and efforts to facilitate security cooperation between the GRC and the GoN would be helpful. The USG could provide increased humanitarian assistance to empower the Bakassi community. An example might be to create a special category of the Ambassador's Self-Help funds to build clinics and schools, and provide potable water and alternatives to deforestation (although logistical and security challenges to running these programs will be significant). Any assistance should be announced soon after August 14 to demonstrate to the Bakassi people that there are visible benefits to joining Cameroon. The USG and the international community should encourage the GRC to send high level representatives to dialogue with the people in Bakassi and to focus more GRC resources in the area (To date, neither Cameroon's Prime Minister nor President Biya have visited the area.) The USG might consider creating a special envoy for the Niger Delta, which could help amplify our diplomatic engagement, seek to heighten GRC and GON attention on the problem, and help to identify resources for the area. We might also assist the GRC with intelligence in the region.

¶14. (C) Whatever our efforts, they will have limited short-term impact on the Bakassi situation, especially starting so close to the August 14 hand-over date. Unfortunately, the reality is that Cameroon will likely be dealing with instability in the region for many years to come, with potential negative effects on criminality and stability in the rest of the country.

¶15. (U) Embassy Abuja reviewed this message.  
GARVEY